

SUMMARY

CHILDREN RECEIVING SSI

DECEMBER 1999

INTRODUCTION

Effective with the December 1997 report, children are now defined as recipients under age 18. Students aged 18–21, previously identified as children, are now categorized as adults, since, for most program purposes, they are treated more like adults than like children. In addition, all average SSI payment amounts shown are based on the amount received in the month of the report, rather than the amount due in the following month. This is to conform to reporting methods used in other SSA publications.

In December 1999, almost 850,000 blind and disabled children were receiving SSI payments. They made up 12.9 percent of the over 6.5 million SSI recipients in December. The December data reflect a decrease of over 31,000 child recipients since June 1999.

To be eligible for SSI payments as a child, an individual must be under age 18, unmarried, and must meet the applicable SSI disability, income, and resource criteria.

The attached tables are a "snapshot" of selected program and demographic characteristics of children who receive SSI payments. Table 1 is based on universe counts. Tables 2–13 are based on the SSI 10-percent sample file for December 1999.

The source record for all of the sample files is the supplemental security record (SSR).

PAYMENTS TO CHILDREN

The average SSI payment received by SSI children in December 1999 was \$431 (table 2). This amount includes federally administered state supplementation where applicable, but does not include any retroactive payments.

The states with the largest numbers of children receiving SSI were California, New York, Florida, Texas, Ohio, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Michigan and North Carolina. Together they accounted for 52 percent of all child recipients.

Table 3 distributes the amount of the federal SSI payments received in December 1999. Sixty-five percent of the children received \$500 at that time.¹ The \$500 represents the maximum amount of federal SSI payable in 1999 to a person without countable income.

AGE, SEX, RACE, LIVING ARRANGEMENT and CITIZENSHIP

In December 1999, 15 percent of the children receiving SSI were under 5 years old. The remainder of those children under age 18 was fairly evenly distributed by age (table 4).

¹ The difference between the number of children with no income in Table 8 and the smaller number receiving the \$500 federal SSI is some children with income deemed from a parent which does not show up in the income fields.

Child recipients are more likely to be boys than girls, by about three to two. This is generally the same gender pattern found among adult disabled recipients.

We are no longer reporting the race of the children due to the large number whose race is not identified on SSA records.

Four out of five of the children lived with their parent(s). Another 14 percent were identified as "in their own household" for purposes of payment determination. For the most part, these children lived with other relatives, in hospitals, nursing homes, residential schools, foster care, or independently. Less than two percent were patients in a medical facility where more than half of the cost of their care is covered by the Medicaid program.

Almost all (99 percent) of the children were United States citizens, either by birth or naturalization.

DIAGNOSIS

Almost two out of three (64 percent) of the SSI children were disabled based on a mental disorder, and most of these (37 percent of all children) were mentally retarded (table 5). The only other diagnostic category of any size was diseases of the nervous system and sense organs (12 percent), which included all of the approximately 6,600 blind children on SSI in December 1999. (This distribution is based on the diagnoses of the 94 percent of the children for whom a diagnostic code is available on the SSR).

The incidence of mental retardation as a primary diagnosis increased with age, from 4 percent of those under age 3 to 50 percent of those aged 13–17. The same pattern appeared among those children under age 18 with psychiatric disorders.

The only diagnostic category with a significant difference between sexes was other psychiatric disorders, 32 percent of the males versus 19 percent of the females (table 6). There was no substantial variation between sexes in the other diagnostic categories.

YOUNG ADULT RECIPIENTS WHO BEGAN AS CHILDREN

In addition to the 844,000 recipients who are currently considered as children for program purposes, the SSI rolls in December 1999 included 502,000 adult recipients who first became eligible for SSI payments with SSA before age 18 (table 7).

Thirty-six percent of these recipients first became eligible during the 1974–80 period, and thus appear to have been receiving SSI for much of their lives.

INCOME OF CHILDREN

About one in four (25 percent) of the children receiving SSI payments had income in December 1999, and most of these had only unearned income (table 8). The most frequent types of cash unearned income were Social Security benefits (7 percent) or support payments from an absent parent (10 percent). Another 1 percent were receiving income based on need (most commonly Temporary Assistance to Needy Families ((TANF) formerly known as AFDC) payments), while 7 percent had some type of in-kind income which was considered for SSI purposes.

About 75 percent of the children had no income on their record.

PARENTS IN THE HOUSEHOLD

Over three-fifths (62 percent) of the children who received SSI payments in December 1999 were living with one parent, and another 25 percent lived with two parents² (table 9). For the 14 percent who are shown with no parent in the household, deeming of income from a parent to a child recipient does not apply, and information about parents is not part of the SSI record.

ONE PARENT HOUSEHOLDS

Of the 62 percent of SSI recipient children who live with only one parent, almost all (95 percent) lived with their mother (table 10). Only 5 percent lived with their father.

For 38 percent of the children in a one-parent family, the parent had no income (the SSI payment is not considered as income in this analysis). Over one-third of the children (34 percent) lived with a parent who had earned income, while for 33 percent of the children the parent had unearned income. Mother-headed households showed about the same distribution, while father-headed homes were a little more likely to have some income and earnings, and a little less likely to have unearned income.

Even where there was some income in the household, the amounts were small. Thirty-three percent of the children were in homes with under \$200 income in the month of December 1999. Only 49 percent of them had \$600 or more in income that month. Children living with a father were more likely to have higher family incomes.

TWO PARENT HOUSEHOLDS

The 25 percent of SSI children who live with two parents (table 11) were relatively better off economically than those living with only one parent. Fourteen percent of the former had no income from parents, compared with 38 percent of those living with one parent. Also, 60 percent of the two parent families had income of \$1,000 per month or more, compared with 19 percent of the children in one-parent families.

Mothers were less likely to have income if there was another parent in the household than were single parent mothers. Sixty-one percent of mothers in two parent families had no income, compared with 38 percent of single mothers.

PARENTAL INCOME IN THE HOUSEHOLD

Three-fifths (60 percent) of the children who received SSI in December 1999 lived in a household where the parent(s) received some type of income, and that income averaged \$982 in December (table 12). About 38 percent of the children had one or more parents with earnings, averaging \$1,360; 28 percent had some type of unearned income, averaging \$251. The most common type of unearned income was public income-maintenance (PIM) payments. This includes TANF payments, Department of Veterans Affairs payments based on need, and other governmental programs.

² The total of children with parents in the household in Table 9 differs slightly from the number of children living in a parent's household in Table 4. This is because the Table 4 number represents only households where a parent is head of the household, where Table 9 includes children living with parents who are not head of the household.

PARENT TO CHILD DEEMING

In households where the parent(s) of SSI children receive income, that income must be considered in determining the child's payment amount. This process is called deeming.

Certain types of parental income are excluded from deeming.³ This includes PIM payments and any parental income used to determine the amount of the PIM payments. In addition, allocations and exclusions reduce the amount used in the child's payment computation.

About 69 percent of the children subject to deeming had one or more parents with income in December (table 13). Of these children, deemed income affected the payment of only 26 percent, after all exclusions and allocations were applied. Children living with two parents (35 percent) were more likely to have their payment affected by deemed income than children living with one parent (21 percent).

³ See 20 CFR 416.1161(a).